

Extract from AJ's Log

Don't blame everything on Murphy

by Frank Start - VE3AJ

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We have the habit of blaming things on this notorious Irish character. I wonder if we are giving this guy a square deal. Give a little thought to happenings in the past and maybe you will find that there are a lot of times when Murphy wasn't to blame at all. Let me give you a few examples of my own experiences.

Case 1.

A ship I was on at one time was fitted with a brand new 500 Watt CW-ICW transmitter. The plate supply was furnished by a 2,000 Volt DC generator. The armature had a 1,000 Volt commutator at each end. At the operating position there was a switch to open the field circuit to render the generator harmless. The radio shack was the usual size, about six by eight feet. One day I thought I detected some commutator hash in the head-phones (this was BL Before Loud-speakers). Rather than walk eight feet to the far end of the shack for new sandpaper, I picked up a used piece and took the two steps to the other side of the room where the generator was located. The Field Switch was ignored. The generator was running. With one hand on the generator for support, (I was tired after the long walk) I proceeded to polish the commutator with the other. However, when the sandpaper wore through, I was still polishing with my fingers. But, not for long! When I picked myself up, (fortunately it was a soft wood deck) I decided that the Field Switch was a very good idea after all. And it wasn't Murphy that pushed me either.

Case 2:

I was working at Soo station taking some meter readings on a 200 Watt R/T transmitter. The set faced into the operating room and formed part of the partition, with the rear of the set in the engine room which had a cement floor. I held the meter ground lead in contact with the metal cabinet with one hand (no gloves, of course)! The meter itself was in an awkward position to read. My right hand with the test lead must have contacted the HOT terminal. I never did know for sure, 700 Volts DC can be nasty. I came to sitting on the cement floor wondering who had kicked me in the rear. Blame Murphy for that?

Case 3:

Another experience was at the local shipyard. We were making a survey to replace the radar. The ship was laid up for the winter. The original radar had been removed but the baseboard on which it had been mounted was still in place. From this board, a piece of armoured cable projected. Its centre conductor was not taped. It looked harmless. I bent it over and touched it against the metal deck. There was a bang like a shotgun blast. It was hot with 220 Volts DC. This was not Murphy - it was two D... fools, one who had closed a switch he was not familiar with and another who had not removed the fuses when the installation was laid up.

There is an old saying that "Familiarity breeds contempt". Don't get too familiar with high voltage - it can be fatal. There is a case on record which happened some years ago. A member of the staff of QS T Headquarters was working on a transmitter after the usual working hours. He was found electrocuted.

LARC